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CHRISTIANIZING PATRIOTISM

Why should a man die for his country? Because it is his country, you reply. But how does that answer the question? Why does the same man object to paying his taxes to his country? And why should a man serve one particular fraction of humanity living within certain geographical bounds more readily than he serves another fraction living within other geographical bounds? You reply, because he is a patriot.

In the answers to these questions will be found the key to the commonly accepted meaning of the word "patriotism." It has been the word to represent the impulse of the individual to identify himself with a detached group of those having the same institutions and history—that is, of his fatherland. In the very nature of the case it has stood for self-defense and antagonism to other people. You will look long before you will find any other reference. The patriot has always been regarded as the man who would defend his country from all attacks of its enemies. Patriotism has been a word of war—the patriot has been the soldier.



The time has come to Christianize patriotism. Loyalty to one's fatherland, which is the heart of the word, is morally defensible only as the fatherland is worthy of such devotion. To Christianize loyalty we must make patriotism co-operative rather than competitive.

So long as nations are separated by distance, mountains, and oceans they are necessarily forced into highly individualistic groups. They grew by conquest. But nowadays there is not a civilized nation that would deliberately say it proposed to grow in such manner. Each nation now engaged in this terrible war protests it

is fighting in self-defense and for those supreme goods of which it is particularly the custodian. In these protestations of service to the world, we can see the stirring of a new conception of the function of nationality. Humanity is more than any nation. The supreme justification of a nation's existence is its worth to humanity.

Patriotism will be really Christianized only when it ceases to be military and becomes vicarious. Fatherlands must be more ready to give justice than to send ultimatums. The Kingdom of God will not come on earth until nations regard themselves as means to the general welfare. We have seen this vicarious conception move steadily up through other social groups. Little by little the sense of human solidarity and of the duties owed by individuals to each other is spreading through our social order. Patriotism will yet be put at the service of the Prince of Peace.



Peace programs will be of little value until the Christian attitude is embodied in individuals and states. We must be ready to fight as long as we are unready to render every nation respect and justice. To seek peace simply as peace may be the height of cowardice; but to seek the conditions which make peace inevitable is both sensible and Christian. Peace with justice is more Christ-like than peace with "honor."

Those of us who believe in Jesus Christ and in the truth of his revelation will not be turned from our confidence in the superiority of righteousness and justice to navies and armies by swashbuckling rhetoric. We know perfectly well how easy is the descent to the fighting passions. We know perfectly well that in demanding that patriotism be co-operative rather than egoistic, ready to give justice rather than to demand rights, we shall be called utopian. Very well. Utopian, feeble, silly, let us be called. What difference does it make? If Jesus is right, we are right!

We have carried the analogies of king and nation over into our thought of God. Now let us carry the character of God, by Jesus revealed, into patriotism.

And God is Love.